

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-EFFICACY, ENGLISH PROFICIENCY, AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

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The main purpose in the study was to examine the efficacy beliefs of Turkish EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers. Teachers' perceptions of their teaching efficacy regarding personal capabilities to teach English and their self-reported English proficiency level were also investigated. The data were collected through a survey completed by 54 teachers. Results indicated that teachers' perceived efficacy was correlated with their self-reported English proficiency, and that teachers' efficacy for instructional strategies was greater than their efficacy for management and engagement. The study provides useful insights into the need to help teachers develop their language proficiency that, in turn, has relevance for their perceived self-efficacy.

Keywords: self-efficacy, English as a foreign language, language proficiency, instructional strategies, second language, Turkey.

Discussions of teaching and learning process have, until recently, placed too much emphasis on teachers' actions and behaviors that are associated with their attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, assumptions, and motivation levels (Bandura, 1993; Pajares, 1992). Particularly, the studies conducted on the basis of teachers' beliefs are important in determining the way teachers perceive and organize instruction. Findings of researchers of teachers' perceptions and beliefs have provided valuable insights into teaching and assessment practices because it has been shown that these perceptions and beliefs not only have a considerable

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impact on teachers' instructional practices and classroom behaviors but also relate to students' outcomes (Johnson, 1992; Wilson & Wineburg, 1988).

Teacher efficacy, defined as *teachers' beliefs about their own effectiveness*, emphasizes a variety of important instructional decisions that ultimately shape students' educational experiences (Soodak & Podell, 1997, p. 214). Bandura (1997) maintains that teachers' sense of efficacy influences both the kind of environment that they create as well as their judgments regarding the different tasks introduced in the classroom in order to bring about student learning. Thus, teacher efficacy appears to have a direct influence on teaching practices and student outcomes. In the present study, teachers' sense of efficacy refers to judgments of teachers of English as a second language about their capabilities to bring about student change (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey & Passaro, 1994). Despite the large number of studies in which teacher efficacy has been investigated in different subject areas, there has been little research on the perceived efficacy of nonnative English-speaking teachers in the context of the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL). Thus, in the present study I explored self-efficacy beliefs among Turkish primary and high-school EFL teachers, taking into account that both teaching tasks and the teachers' assessment of their capabilities form part of their efficacy (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).

One area that deserves attention in the study of teacher efficacy relates to the relationship between teachers' efficacy and other personal and contextual variables, such as teacher behaviors and student outcomes. In research aimed at addressing these issues it has been found that teachers' self efficacy has a considerable impact on student proficiency (Gibson & Dembo, 1984), on teachers' adoption of instructional innovation (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Guskey, 1988), on teachers' classroom management (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990), and on teachers' personal characteristics such as gender, grade level, and teaching experience (Ghaith & Shaaban, 1999; Soodak & Podell, 1997; Woolfolk & Murphy, 2001).

Chacon (2005) investigated the perceived efficacy of a group of EFL teachers in Venezuela and examined how this influenced their self-reported English proficiency. Data were collected through the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) and two other subscales (self-reported proficiency and pedagogical strategies). Results showed that teachers' perceived efficacy was positively correlated with their self-reported English proficiency. The results also indicated that the level of efficacy did not have an effect on the kinds of strategies the teachers preferred.

Guskey (1988) also explored the relationships among teachers' teaching experience, efficacy, and attitudes toward implementing instructional innovations. Participants in that study were 120 elementary and secondary school teachers

who attended a staff development program that involved mastery learning of instructional strategies and innovations. Guskey found that teachers who regarded instructional innovation practices as being similar to their present teaching practices rated them as easier to implement than did teachers who regarded instructional innovations as very different from their current teaching methods.

In their study of the link between teacher efficacy and student achievement, Gibson and Dembo (1984) revealed significant differences between highly efficacious teachers and those who were assessed as having a low level of efficacy. Teachers who were very efficacious made better use of time, criticized students' incorrect answers less, and were more effective in guiding students to correct answers through their questioning (Chacon, 2005). However, teachers low in efficacy tended to spend more time in nonacademic activities and made use of less effective techniques to guide students to correct responses (Chacon).

Placing a strong emphasis on peer coaching, Goker (2006) investigated self-efficacy and instructional skills of EFL preservice teachers in Northern Cyprus, and found that peer coaching improved the self-efficacy of the teachers. The findings in this study also demonstrated that experiential activities, such as the teaching practicum or other mastery experiences potentially had a great effect on the self-efficacy of these preservice teachers.

Based on the research discussed above, language proficiency and instructional strategies of EFL teachers have been identified as two significant variables related to teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Hence, in the present study I explored the sense of efficacy for teaching among a group of Turkish EFL teachers. I also examined the relationships among self-efficacy, self-reported language proficiency, and self-reported instructional strategies in this same group of Turkish EFL teachers. The following were the research questions in this investigation:

1. What are the perceived levels of self-efficacy beliefs for engagement, classroom management, and instructional strategies among primary and high-school EFL teachers in Turkey?
2. What are the perceived levels of English proficiency of Turkish primary and high-school EFL teachers in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills?
3. What sorts of pedagogical strategies do Turkish primary and high-school teachers employ to teach EFL?
4. What are the correlations among Turkish EFL teachers' sense of efficacy for students' engagement, classroom management, and instructional strategies and their self-reported English proficiency (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills)?

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The participants in the study were teachers working in primary and high schools from various school districts in the city of Çanakkale, Turkey. A total of 54 Turkish EFL teachers between 1 and 16 years of experience teaching English, participated in this study (40 females and 14 males).

The questionnaire was completed by the participating teachers who volunteered and who were randomly selected from 12 primary and 8 high schools in the city that had pupil rolls ranging from 450 to 1,300. The aim in the study, initially, was that equal numbers of experienced English teachers from each school would be included in the study, but this was not accomplished because of the voluntary participation policy. The selection and evaluation of all the teachers conformed to the same rules and regulations. The return rate of the questionnaire was 100%.

INSTRUMENT

A three-part questionnaire assessing teachers' self-efficacy was developed for this study. Part One, dealing with the English teachers' perceived efficacy for engagement, classroom management, and instructional strategies, was adapted from the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001), and had 12 statements. Part Two, assessing teachers' self-reported English proficiency, was made up of 12 statements, and was derived from the studies by Butler (2004) and Chacon (2005). Part Three, consisting of 10 statements, dealt with teachers' self-reported pedagogical strategies to teach EFL (grammatically or communicatively oriented), and was adapted from the study by Eslami and Fatahi (2008). All the answers regarding the efficacy and pedagogical subscales in the questionnaire were rated on 5-point Likert scales, ranging from *never* (1) to *always* (5) for Parts One and Three, and from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5) for the section on English language proficiency.

The study was carried out in March 2009 at the primary and high schools in the city of Çanakkale and the data obtained were analyzed using the SPSS program. The reliability of the instrument was assessed by computing Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each of the five major subscales mentioned above, which resulted in, respectively, .69 for EFL teachers' self-efficacy engagement, .68 for their self-efficacy in management, .70 for self-efficacy in implementing instructional strategies, .85 for their self-reported English proficiency in all four skills, and .77 for EFL teachers' self-reported pedagogical strategies. Both descriptive statistics and correlational analysis (inferential statistics) were used in the study. In addition to computing descriptive statistics for each item and subcategory of the EFL teachers' self-efficacy instrument, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient r was also computed between the subcategories of the main variable

(teacher self-efficacy) and the other variables (i.e., English proficiency and the use of grammatically or communicatively oriented strategies).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

EFFICACY IN ENGAGEMENT, CLASS MANAGEMENT, AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

The descriptive statistics for the self-efficacy beliefs for teachers' interactive engagement, classroom management, and instructional strategies are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
TURKISH EFL TEACHERS' SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS

Items of efficacy subscales	<i>M</i> *	<i>SD</i>
Efficacy for student engagement		
1. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in learning English?	4.24	0.70
2. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in English?	4.40	1.30
3. How much can you do to help your students value learning English?	4.33	0.67
4. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	3.31	1.02
Total	4.07	0.59
Efficacy for class management		
5. How much can you do to get students to follow classroom rules in your English classroom?	4.37	0.65
6. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	4.50	1.22
7. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy in your English class?	4.24	0.70
8. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	4.22	0.63
Total	4.33	0.56
Efficacy for instructional strategies		
9. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies in your English class?	4.31	0.67
10. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when your English students are confused?	4.56	0.57
11. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	4.37	0.65
12. How well can you implement alternative strategies tailored to suit individual needs of students in terms of learning style and language proficiency in your English classroom?	4.31	0.70
Total	4.39	0.44

* The mean difference is significant at $p < .05$.

The means of the three subscales indicated that the EFL teachers in the study rated themselves as more efficacious in instructional strategies than in either managing the class or engaging students. Item 4 in the engagement subscale

which relates to students' motivation and attitudes towards English, had the lowest mean. This, in turn, suggests that teachers judged their abilities to enable students to benefit from learning English as being low but they perceived themselves as more capable in other areas such as providing alternative explanations (item 10) and controlling disruptive behavior (item 6). These results are compatible with the results of previous research (Chacon, 2005; Eslami & Fatahi, 2008) illustrating that teachers of English as a foreign language have been found to be more oriented towards the use of instructional strategies in studies carried out in Venezuela, Iran, and Turkey.

PERCEIVED ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for each of the 12 items designed for measuring the EFL teachers' English proficiency.

TABLE 2
TURKISH EFL TEACHERS' SELF-REPORTED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Items of English proficiency subscales	<i>M</i> [*]	<i>SD</i>
1. In face-to-face interaction with an English speaker, I can participate in a conversation at a normal speed.	4.39	0.65
2. I know the necessary strategies to help maintain a conversation with an English speaker.	4.78	3.85
3. I feel comfortable using English as the language of instruction in my English class.	4.30	0.74
4. I can watch English news (for example, CNN) and/or English films without subtitles.	4.19	0.97
5. I understand the meaning of common idiomatic expressions used by English speakers.	4.02	0.69
6. I can understand English speakers conversing at a normal speed.	4.63	0.52
7. I can understand magazines, newspapers, and popular novels when I read them in English.	4.59	0.50
8. I can draw inferences/conclusions from what I read in English.	4.52	0.57
9. I can figure out the meaning of unknown words in English from the context.	4.57	0.57
10. I can write business and personal letters in English without errors that interfere with the meaning I want to convey.	3.94	0.81
11. I can fill in different kinds of application forms in English (e.g., credit card application).	4.31	0.77
12. I can write a short essay in English on a topic of which I have knowledge.	4.56	0.66
English skills		
Speaking	4.49	1.35
Listening	4.28	0.58
Reading	4.56	0.42
Writing	4.27	0.58

* The mean difference is significant at $p < .05$.

Overall, as displayed in Table 2, Turkish EFL teachers rated themselves as more proficient in reading and speaking than in writing or listening. "Understanding magazines, newspapers, and popular novels in English" was the reading skill at which participants felt most competent. Notably, high competence in reading skill draws attention to the heavy emphasis on reading in the EFT classroom context. For speaking, "Knowing the necessary strategies to help maintain a conversation with an English speaker" had the highest mean, indicating that teachers perceived themselves as very fluent in using English for instructional purposes. As for listening, teachers felt less competent in "Understanding the meaning of common idiomatic expressions used by native speakers". Writing business and personal letters was perceived to be the most difficult writing skill. This lack of proficiency in writing can be attributed to the highly academic emphasis in English language teaching in the Turkish classroom.

SELF-REPORTED USE OF PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

TABLE 3
TURKISH EFL TEACHERS' USE OF PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

Items of pedagogical strategies subscales	<i>M*</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. I use the students' native language rather than English to explain terms or concepts that are difficult to understand.	2.96	1.00
2. I ask students to memorize new vocabulary or phrases without showing them how to use the words in context.	2.35	1.26
3. As a classroom exercise, I ask students to translate single sentences in an English text into their native language.	2.80	1.27
4. I give students the opportunity to get into groups and discuss answers to problem-solving activities.	3.93	0.90
5. I play audio tapes that feature native English speakers' conversation exchanges and ask students to answer questions related to the conversation.	3.70	1.11
6. I use grammatical rules to explain complex English sentences to students.	3.78	1.45
7. I play English films and videotapes in class and ask students to engage in discussions about the films or videotapes.	3.33	1.21
8. I pay more attention to whether students can produce grammatically correct sentences than to whether or not they can speak English with fluency.	3.22	0.88
9. I ask students to converse with one another in English and encourage them to find opportunities to speak English outside the classroom.	3.65	1.01
10. I present students with real-life situations and ask them to come up with responses in English that are appropriate to these situations	3.96	0.97
Strategy subscales		
Grammatically oriented	3.02	0.77
Communicatively oriented	3.71	0.82

* The mean difference is significant at $p < .05$.

In the context of the 10 items in this section, 5 items were intended to apply to grammatically oriented activities (1, 2, 3, 6, 8) and 5 to communicatively oriented ones (4, 5, 7, 9, 10). Overall, communication-oriented strategies had a higher mean than grammar-oriented strategies, showing the teachers tended to use communication-based instructional strategies more than grammar-based activities. The teachers reported using grammatical rules to explain complex English sentences to students as the most frequently used grammar-related activity and asking students to memorize new vocabulary or phrases without showing them how to use the words in context as the least frequently used grammar-related activity. Among the communication-oriented instructional strategies, giving students the opportunity to get into groups and discuss answers to problem-solving activities as well as presenting students with real-life situations and asking for appropriate responses in English (item 10, $M = 3.96$) were perceived as the most frequently used strategies. In contrast, playing English films and videotapes in class and asking students to engage in discussions about films or videotapes were the least frequently used teaching strategies.

CORRELATIONS AMONG EFL TEACHERS SENSE OF SELF-EFFICACY AND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY, AND PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

As displayed in Table 4 below, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients signify the relationships among the subscales of the EFL teachers' sense of efficacy and their perceived English proficiency in four skills.

TABLE 4
CORRELATIONS AMONG SELF-EFFICACY SUBSCALES AND OTHER VARIABLES

Variables	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing	GOS	COS
Engagement	0.20	0.22	0.10	0.13	0.05	0.15
Management	0.14	0.34*	0.20	0.28*	0.07	0.17
Instructional strategies	0.09	0.39*	0.25	0.35*	0.08	0.22

* Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed)

GOS = Grammatically oriented strategies

COS = Communicatively oriented strategies.

Positive correlations were obtained among the Turkish EFL teachers' self-reported perceptions of classroom management, instructional strategies, and their self-reported English proficiency in listening and writing skills (Table 4). Statistically significant results regarding the correlation coefficients were gained for the teachers' sense of efficacy for classroom management and listening, and writing, and between their self-efficacy for implementing instructional strategies and their self-reported proficiency in listening and writing. These findings reveal

that the more proficient the teachers perceived themselves to be in listening and writing, the more efficacious they felt in constructing instructional strategies as well as in classroom management.

In contrast to my expectations and the related literature (Chacon, 2005), the correlation coefficients among the EFL teachers' self-efficacy subscales and their reading and speaking proficiencies were not found to be statistically significant. I found it interesting that the teachers rated themselves as most proficient in reading and listening, but the teachers' sense of efficacy for engaging students in language-learning activities effectively did not yield results that are significantly correlated with their self-reported English proficiency in any of the four basic language skills assessed in the study. This result was consistent with the teachers' low self-rating on helping students to do well in school and changing their motivation or attitude towards English (see Table 1).

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding obtained in the present study was the positive relationship between the teachers' sense of self-efficacy and their perceived level of language proficiency. The results indicated that the more proficient the EFL teachers perceived themselves to be across the four basic skills, the more efficacious they felt. Given Bandura's (1997) theory, this finding is of value in that teachers' self-evaluation made on the basis of their teaching competence has a considerable impact on classroom practices in regard to teachers' efforts and targets, and the challenges they set for themselves and for their students.

As Ghaith and Shaaban (1999) point out, teachers are key agents of change in the successful implementation of educational practice. The implications of results obtained in the present study can assist in highlighting the importance of training EFL teachers who are competent in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, along with using training programs concerned with professional development of teachers. In the light of evidence in this study of the close link between self-efficacy and language proficiency, EFL teachers should be directed to teacher education programs by school administrators in order either to maintain or enhance their sense of efficacy. The results gained in this study suggest that EFL teachers' competency to read, speak, listen, and write in English leads to their gaining a strong sense of efficacy.

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